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July 9, 2008

ATTN: Ms. Linda Tolentino-Thomas
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Dear Ms. Tolentino-Thomas,

Enclosed you will find the original copy of the County of San Diego's Peer Quality Case Review Report.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (858)514-6640.

Thank You,

Gil Fierro
Manager, Child Welfare Services

PQCR Cover Sheet

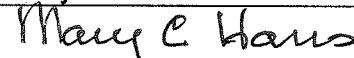
California's Child and Family Services Review Peer Quality Case Review

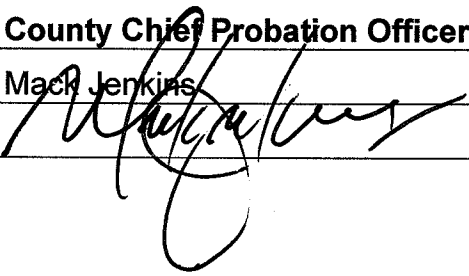
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Submitted by each agency for the children under its care

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California - Child and Family Services Review Peer Quality Case Review County of San Diego



2008

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Mack Jenkins, Chief Probation Officer

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Background

Pursuant to AB 636, effective January 2004, a new Child Welfare Services Outcome and Accountability System began operating in California. It focuses primarily on measuring outcomes in the areas of Safety, Permanence and Child and Family Well-Being. The new system operates on a philosophy of continuous quality improvement, interagency partnerships, community involvement, and public reporting of program outcomes.

This new Outcomes & Accountability system, also known as the California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR), includes three processes which together provide a comprehensive picture of County child welfare practices. Since 2005, CDSS has aligned the C-CFSR triennial cycle so Counties are staggered; the Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR) is the first component of the C-CFSR process. The PQCR replaces the Division 31 compliance audit. The purpose of the Peer Quality Case Review is to learn, through intensive examination of County social work and probation officer practice, how to improve child welfare and probation services and practice. The County of San Diego completed its first PQCR in April 2005.

The County Self-Assessment (CSA) is the next process in the cycle. The CSA is driven by a focused analysis of child welfare data. This process also incorporates input from various child welfare constituents. The County of San Diego County completed its first CSA in June 2004 and a modified CSA in June 2006.

A principal component of the new system is the County System Improvement Plan (SIP). The SIP serves as the operational agreement between the County and the State, outlining how the County will improve its system to provide improved outcomes for children, youth and families. Quarterly County Data Reports are the mechanism for tracking the county's progress. The SIP includes specific milestones, timeframes and improvement targets. The County of San Diego's previous SIP was submitted in July 2006 to the California Department of Social Services, (CDSS) after approval of the Board of Supervisors. The findings from this PQCR (April 21-25, 2008) as well as the information gathered during the upcoming CSA (Fall 2008) will provide input for the next County of San Diego's SIP, due to CDSS in January 2009.

The sections of this report include the following sections:

- Executive Summary of the PQCR findings including description of PQCR process
- Summary of the data collected throughout the PQCR
- Final observations and recommendations from the PQCR
- Appendices (Including interview and debrief tools and focus group guides)

Executive Summary

The purpose of the Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR) is to learn through a qualitative examination of County Child Welfare and Probation practices. The PQCR is driven by the idea that social workers and probation officers have valuable insight in how the system works and how to affect change in the outcomes for children, youth and families.

"Tangible results" which were identified through the previous PQCR process in the County of San Diego were evident in this 2008 review process. Two recommendations from the 2005 PQCR included Family Engagement training for CWS social workers and reduced caseload size for probation officers in the Placement Unit. Both of these recommendations were adopted and the 2008 PQCR review teams noted social workers were able to clearly identify engagement strategies used when meeting with the family and probation officers had formed strong relationships with the youth they served, as they had more time to focus on youth and engaging their parents.

Child Welfare – Focus area Recurrence of Maltreatment of children under six years of age

In the planning process of identifying referrals for review two salient points were identified, and were noted to address in the future:

- How the child and parents ethnicity was identified and coded in the Child Welfare System/Case Management System (CWS/CMS system), particularly in reference to Native American families.
- The assignment of duplicate referrals.

Both of these concerns were discovered early in the planning process and are an indication of how the PQCR is a continuum of learning, counties learn in the planning process as well as during the formal review process.

The overall findings can be found in the attached report, but paramount from focus groups and interviews for CWS were three themes which impact the recurrence of maltreatment.

- The handling of allegations of emotional abuse, as a result of domestic violence, especially in families in the military. Social Workers indicated the current domestic violence policy presents challenges and obstacles to serving these families. Recommendations include a review of current domestic violence policy and its impact on practice and a dialogue with County Counsel regarding the best way to protect children in this situation.
- The limited time allotted to complete an investigation and close a referral, (30 days) is challenging to engage the family, link to services and ensure the services are in place. Recommendations include consulting with CDSS regarding the pros/cons for utilizing expanded timeframe of 60 days to complete investigations

- The final CWS theme pertained to training. Workers and supervisors stated in general the training offered through the County and the Public Child Welfare Training Academy (PCWTA) are excellent opportunity to enhance skills to work better with children, youth and families. Recommendations include providing training within regions to provide better access for all to attend and to revise and offer ICWA training to include not only regulations but also available resources.

Probation – Focus Area Transition to Adulthood

Throughout the planning process for Probation, there was an openness and acceptance of the challenges probation officers face in providing services to this vulnerable population. While many of the challenges were known, there was not a firm concept of how to approach addressing the challenging areas. Clear themes from the focus groups and interviews were identified for Probation to review and to begin to set out concrete and tangible plans to adopt.

- The identification of a general lack of knowledge among the probation officers of the roles and responsibility of Child Welfare social workers, Independent Living Skills (ILS) workers as well as, ILS resources. Recommendations include cross-training between CWS, ILS and Probation to increase knowledge and communication between disciplines.
- While different constituent groups identified distinctive points of transfer and the difficulties within their own identified process, an overall theme of improving the transfer and referral process within Probation to include the provision of full documentation was identified. Recommendations include adopting a policy for transfer and referral process to include full documentation. Additionally, explore the idea of holding Independent Readiness conferences as currently done in CWS.
- The final significant point identified involves the Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) document. During the PQCR process it was identified that the placement unit probation officer does not complete the TILP or any other assessment documents to assist in preparing youth for exiting the system. Recommendations include the regular use of the TILP among probation officers as well as introducing another form of assessment of the youth to target specific needs and identify strengths.

County Perspective

In the County of San Diego, Child Welfare Services (CWS) is the primary County entity responsible for providing child welfare services to families experiencing child abuse and neglect. Juvenile Probation is the department responsible for providing child welfare services to children involved in the County's juvenile delinquency system and placed in out-of-home care. Because CWS and Juvenile Probation play an important role in providing child welfare services to children and families, both worked, along with CDSS, to plan, co-chair and complete the PQCR process.

In 2007, the County of San Diego CWS received referrals on 69,960 children with almost 51,000 children being assigned for investigation. 2,114 new petitions were filed on behalf of children who were abused or neglected¹. On average, each month 2,258 families participated in voluntary services; 2,830 children received in-home services; and 6,222 children were in out-of-home care². The County of San Diego Juvenile Probation supervises approximately 3,400 youth which includes 153 youth placed in Foster Care. Of these youth, 92% fall within the ages of 15-18 years of age and are preparing to transition to adulthood from the Probation system.

Focus Areas

The focus area regarding this PQCR cycle for Child Welfare was **Recurrence of Maltreatment specifically for children under the age of six**, and the focus area for Probation was **Transition to Adulthood**.

Child Welfare Services Focus Area Selection

The **Recurrence of Maltreatment** was chosen by the CWS Management Team after a comprehensive review of the County's child welfare outcome data trends reports and recent literature published on recurrence of maltreatment. Kohl and Barth (2007) indicated there were certain case characteristics commonly found in families where the children have suffered recurrence of maltreatment. Spurred by this information, CWS was further convinced that a more thorough investigation of their case practices would better equip social workers, supervisors and managers to aid families in crisis. Additionally, the County's CWS Director, Mary Harris, is focusing the agency on the fundamentals of social work practice and reviewing cases from the initial investigation would help identify next steps.

In FY 2006-07, the County of San Diego's rate of recurrence was 6.9% equating to 240 children³. This is slightly better than the State average of 7.5% but does not meet the federal standard of no more than 5.4%⁴. Of particular concern is the

¹ CWS/CMS Data, CRC Annual Report

² Ibid

³ CWS/CMS UC Berkeley Quarterly Data Report

⁴ Ibid.

rate of recurrence of maltreatment for children under the age of six that made up close to 50% of the children identified as having recurrence of abuse⁵. While this measure is not outlined in the previous SIP, San Diego management determined that these children were most vulnerable and wanted to ensure County practices were in line with providing the highest quality of service to these children and families. When the measure was first chosen the management team had access to data through April 2007, at that time the rate was actually the same as the State's (7.5%). Indicating that CWS's current policy and practice was already moving in a positive direction and information from the PQCR process would continue and advance this trend.

Probation Focus Area Selection

Probation's focus was **Transition to Adulthood**. The area of focus was chosen as many of the wards that enter the foster care system at a later age often age out of the system. The majority enter foster care based on their offense and treatment needs, versus a dependency issue. These youth are seen as most vulnerable to not reunify with their family of origin. Additionally, they need transitional services to increase their level of independence, if reunification is not possible. Their offense and probation status create barriers in finding transitional services for Probation wards, even though they are still considered in foster care. As a result, the challenge of this PQCR is to examine the processes and resources available for the Probation foster care population.

The main goal of the Probation PQCR was to identify who is receiving transitional services through the Independent Living Skills (ILS) program, in line with the Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP), the extent of these services, and challenges and barriers in accessing these services. An additional focus was to examine the current practices and resources available for Probation foster youth that transition to adulthood. This would help identify needs and resources and solidify the Probation Officer's role in assisting youth in acquiring and securing these services.

Agency PQCR Preparation

The County of San Diego, throughout this process, demonstrated a belief that the PQCR is invaluable in assisting to drill more deeply into practice areas which address the needs of the children, youth and families they serve. It was clear that all concerned were hopeful that three years from now, a noticeable difference in the way families are engaged, assessed and services provided, could be identified, in reducing the recurrence of maltreatment and for Probation youth exiting the system and transitioning to adulthood.

There were many and varied opportunities extended for staff in both Child Welfare and Probation to orient them to the PQCR purpose and process. While CWS's case selection would include staff from each of the six regions, Probation's case selection involved one single juvenile field unit. Ensuring that

⁵ Ibid.

staff in both agencies had access to the same information was a key consideration in preparing for the PQCR interviews.

Initially for CWS, discussions with the management team were held in the months preceding the PQCR planning, outlining the focus area and goals for the process. The expectation of those early discussions was that managers would filter the information to their respective supervisors and onto line staff. For Probation, many of the staff were familiar with the PQCR process as they had participated in the previous PQCR and were beneficiaries of the recommendations made in the last round. Probation staff welcomed the opportunity to learn more about their practice to better the outcomes of the youth they serve.

In February 2008, a newsletter was distributed to selected staff providing information regarding the PQCR process; the focus area selected and also provided some basic information about confidentiality and case selection. A PQCR "Kick-Off" event was held on February 22nd and invitations were sent to staff, peer counties, and community partners to attend. The objective of the kick was to provide general information for all PQCR participants and community partners about San Diego, the focus area and process. Staff selected for interviews were provided information by their regional PQCR representative, given a letter describing the process, a copy of the interview tools, and were invited to a "Pre-briefing" session, two weeks prior to the PQCR event week, for question and answer time regarding the process and to give their input regarding concerns and desired results. Union representatives for both Probation and Child Welfare were invited to both the kick-off and pre-briefing events.

I. Methodology

Unique County Characteristics/Issues

The San Diego metropolitan area is the 3rd most populated county in California and 17th most populated in the United States. With a population of nearly 3.1 million residents, The County of San Diego has the 6th largest population among all counties in the United States. Its land mass includes an 80 mile border with Mexico, over 70 miles of coastland and it spans over 4,200 square miles.

San Diego's location along the coastline makes it an ideal position for military forces. The military influence in the area and the dynamics involved with serving families dealing with wartime duty, deployment and loss adds to the complexity of child welfare work. San Diego's coastline also allows for the migration of children and families from particularly, Central and South America. Because of San Diego's proximity to Mexico, the region is becoming increasingly bicultural, and the city is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse places in the nation. More than 100 languages are spoken by San Diego residents who have come from all parts of the world to live here.⁶ This diversity adds to the richness of the County's culture and to the complex services needed to meet the varied needs of the residents.

⁶ <http://www.sandag.org/index.asp?classid=26&fuseaction=home.classhome>

The County of San Diego boasts 18 federally recognized Native American reservations. The County of San Diego has more Indian reservations than any other county in the United States. The reservations have total land holdings of just over 124,000 acres, or about 193 square miles and house more than 6,000 residents.⁷ With that in mind, the County's Child Welfare Services established an Indian Specialist Unit (ISU) consisting of Indian Child Welfare expert social workers assigned to cases involving children from the local tribes and all federally recognized tribes. The ISU works directly with tribal representatives for placement and case planning needs of the family.

Data Collection

The PQCR process collected data to be analyzed from a variety of sources including those from CWS/CMS UC Berkeley Data reports based on the State of California AB636 Outcome Measure 1A. Social worker and probation officer interviews were completed to collect qualitative data on cases selected. In addition to interviewing social workers and probation officers, CWS and Probation elected to conduct focus groups with different constituent groups to learn from a broad base of experiences regarding the focus areas. Focus groups included those representing:

- Parents
- Youth
- Social Workers
- Social Work Supervisors
- ILS Providers
- CWS Providers
- ICWA experts and tribal social service providers

Case Sample/ Social Worker Selection

The intention of the PQCR is to obtain qualitative data with respect to practice; therefore the focus was to obtain an objective agency-wide representation of cases and workers. A sample size of 30 cases was selected for CWS and 12 cases for Probation. This decision was based on feedback from other jurisdictions, as well as the time limitations of the review teams. An additional pool of cases was identified to ensure an adequate number of cases/workers were available as back-ups for interviews.

The County of San Diego System Improvement Plan for CWS includes the Systemic Factor of Fairness and Equity issues. The County recognized the disproportionate number African American and Native American groups who historically have been overly represented in the child welfare. San Diego County's Commission on Children Youth and Families (CCYF), developed the Fairness and Equity sub-committee made up of representatives from CWS, community partners and stakeholders committed to exploring the issue of disproportionality and developing strategies to address it. CWS has made an increasing effort over the past two years with the Native American community to have conversations regarding child welfare improvement and best practices in

⁷ <http://www.sandiego.edu/nativeamerican/reservations.html>

their community in an attempt to bridge the historic gap between the agency and the Tribes. To that end, The County of San Diego CWS was the first County in California to invite the Native American community to participate in their PQCR process. Indian child welfare experts were invited to participate as peer reviewers for Native American family cases selected for the process.

The original case selection parameters for CWS were as follows⁸:

- Identification of children who had a recurrence of maltreatment during the most recent fiscal year 2006-2007 (239 children);
- After review of current literature, the decision to focus on children under the 6 years of ages as they accounted for 49% of the recurrence and the literature suggested that recurrence is more common among younger children (107 children);
- Duplicate referrals or referrals that could have been either associated to a recently received referral or evaluated out and passed along to the workers were identified early in the process and screened out. This realization early in the process enabled administration to re-think the assignment process and consider policy changes that would most assuredly affect the recurrence rate reported.
- In reviewing cases for selection, 3 Native American families with 8 children were found that met the criteria for recurrence. (Note: When looking at the primary ethnicity of the children no Native American children were identified. However, when reviewing the tribal affiliations of the parents' ethnicities the above cases were selected for review.)
- Finally, because most Child Welfare services are decentralized among 6 regions, case selection was randomized within each region so that there would be representation agency-wide. Each region has different resources, languages and CWS wanted to ensure the case selection would reflect all of these characteristics.
- Other factors considered were: One case per worker maximum and ensuring the social worker was currently employed by the Agency.

The original case selection parameters for Probation were as follows⁹:

- Probation cases were initially randomly selected for review;
- All of the youth must be active wards of the Juvenile Court at the time of the review;
- The youth must have been in a foster care placement (foster home, group home or other institution);
- All of the youth must be between the ages of 15-18 yrs.

All of the cases meeting the above criteria were also screened with the Case Review Tool. This tool enabled the PQCR team to review the initial case findings for its appropriateness. The case review tool doubled as a way for the review teams to gather pertinent case information.

⁸ Taken from CWS talking points of Kick-Off presentation 2/22/08.

⁹ Taken from CWS talking points of Kick-Off presentation 2/22/08.

Focus Group Selection

Ten (10) focus groups were held between Probation and CWS constituents. Probation focus groups included: Probation youth, Probation parents/caregivers, Probation/ILP providers. CWS focus groups included: Parents, CWS community service providers, ICWA experts and tribal social service providers, emergency response social workers, and supervisors.

In an effort to foster a more comfortable environment, the focus groups for parents and youth were facilitated by a community family advocate and past recipient of both Child Welfare and Probation services. The tribal social service provider group was co-facilitated with a Native American community partner and was held at one of the Indian health clinics located at one of the local reservations. CDSS consultants took notes at each of the focus groups by using a lab top computer and projector.

Review Team Composition

San Diego County's Peer Review team consisted of fifteen members; eight local staff and ten staff from other California jurisdictions. Contra Costa, Imperial, Inyo, Sacramento, Santa Clara and Riverside counties were selected as peer review jurisdictions. Peer County's were selected with the following criteria in mind: Innovative programming; performance in focus area outcomes; reciprocity; and location.

In total, there were five review teams consisting of three to four members. CWS had four review teams, including one team focused on Native American families. Each of the peer county interviewers participating in the CWS reviews was at the level of an Emergency Response Supervisor (with one reviewer being an Agency Director and two child welfare managers). The Native American Team included three local Indian Child Welfare experts (tribal elder, ICWA Program Director, ICWA social worker) and one peer county reviewer. Two County of San Diego supervisors and one Senior Protective Services Worker were selected to participate in the review process, specifically as a time-keeper or scribe. (Special attention was given to ensure that no staff reviewed cases with workers they supervise or from their same region) Involving County staff proved a very helpful resource for the out-of-county reviewers, as they were able to explain local practice in the moment. Probation had one four-member review team. Probation also included probation supervisors from out-of-county, one county child welfare supervisor from the Independent Living Skills unit and a foster youth services liaison from the County Office of Education on their review team. A very helpful addition to the Probation review team was the inclusion of a CWS Supervisor and Foster Youth Services Education liaison who directly work provide ILP services.

Review Process

Each review team was given a packet of information on the first day of the Event week. This packet included a Binder with all of the relevant material outlining the week's duties. A daily schedule was given to each review team member indicating the time and location of all events. Case material to prepare for the interviews was also given to the review team members (Note: All review team

member signed confidentiality forms and were told not to leave hotel with sensitive documents). A county specific acronym list was provided to all review team members.

The first day of the review week consisted of training for review team members. Training goals were as follows:

- To provide information to the PQCR Review Teams on tasks and responsibilities during the PQCR week
- To provide an orientation on the PQCR process to those being interviewed
- To develop a common understanding of the purpose and desired outcomes of the PQCR process
- To develop effective working teams
- To practice the interview process
- To develop a plan for creating a safe and supportive interview environment

Interviews were scheduled for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Each CWS team performed three interviews per day, except the Native American review team who completed their three interviews on one day. Probation review teams performed four interviews per day. Teams were given time each morning to review cases and to debrief after each interview. Review team members were provided with the PQCR Case Review Tool and for CWS, the investigative narrative for each referral. All teams met together each afternoon for a debrief session that consisted of summarizing daily trends in practice around five areas (documentation trends, strengths and promising practices, training needs, resource issues, State technical assistance). Child Welfare debriefed interviews one hour prior to Probation and remained in the room for Probation. The decision to request CWS reviewers and allowing them to add information during Probation's debrief, proved helpful at gathering additional information.

100% of the interviews were performed with only one having to be rescheduled.

On Thursday after debriefing for the day's interviews, the trends for the week were summarized and posted around the room. Each reviewer voted for the three to five top trends under each practice area mentioned above. The top trends were noted in each practice area and each team was then asked to fashion possible recommendations to address each of the trends identified.

Friday morning, a final presentation from members of each review team of the week's themes and trends was given. Guest reviewers were also asked to identify their local best practices specific to the focus areas, which they believed may help San Diego improve outcomes for children, youth and families.

Data Collection

Individual responses to interview questions social workers were captured on the social worker or probation officer interview tool. Data Collection was enhanced by the use of laptops in the interview rooms. At the end of each interview, the

review team either entered that information on a laptop provided in the interview rooms, or had the hand-written debrief form transcribed. An Excel spreadsheet was developed for capturing the debrief trend data after each interview. To protect staff confidentiality, no case or staff names were documented. To ensure that all information from the interviews was collected onto the excel spreadsheet a quality assurance process of review was employed.

Interview Tools

Distinct interview tools were developed and utilized for the social workers, probation officers and for the different constituent groups interviewed during focus groups. Information was collected on practices relevant to the focus areas as well as family engagement, barriers, systemic issues and recommendations for improvements. Interview tools are attached in Appendix A.

The Social Worker Interview Tool was developed to address casework practice issues relevant to the focus area and contained questions in the following areas:

- Safety & Risk Assessment
- Delivery of Service
- Family strengths
- Cultural issues and practices
- Utilization of risk and safety assessment tools/TDM/supervision in decision-making
- Factors considered to make risk and safety assessment decisions
- Barriers to service provision
- Social work practices they were proud of and other practice observations
- Systemic barriers to engagement and individualization of case plans
- Recommendations which would better able workers to support families and reduce recurrence of maltreatment

The Probation Officer Interview Tool was developed to identify practices and services available to support youth as they transition from the Probation system to adulthood and self-sufficiency. The Probation Officer Interview Tool contained questions in the following areas:

- Engagement of youth and assessment of youths needs
- Both youths and family's perception of youth needs
- Delivery of transitional living services
- Existing formal services
- Systemic factors – Department policy which supports or is a barrier to service provision or practice
- Probation practices they were proud of and other practice observations
- Systemic barriers to engagement and individualization of case plans
- Recommended systemic changes to promote engagement and individualization

The focus group tools were developed with each constituent group in mind. The questions were designed to spark conversation around the focus areas and to help pinpoint areas in practice from service providers, parents, youth, tribal

community and others vantage point. The decision to hold specific focus groups for supervisor and emergency response social workers in CWS was made to give an opportunity for global input to those who may not have the opportunity to complete an interview.

All of the Interview tools were developed by the PQCR planning team. The interview tools were reviewed weekly with planning team members and were tested casually with workers to ensure the ease and flow of the questions was adequate. Mock interviews were held two weeks prior to the PQCR event week and the tools were modified based on input from social workers and probation officers mock sessions. The PQCR Executive team reviewed the tools and provided final approval for their usage.

Successes and Lessons Learned

The PQCR event week went smoothly with few challenges. Feedback from review team members was that the process was well organized and that they were impressed by the caliber of staff interviewed. Feedback from social workers and supervisors interviewed was that the process was positive and that the opportunity to give input and feedback was appreciated. Contributing to the success of the project were the following:

- Early initiation of planning with a highly detailed work plan
- Newsletter/All Staff flyers
- Communication at all levels
- Weekly telephone conference call with Agenda
- Partnering early in the process with PCWTA
- Hosting all PQCR events at one off-site and central location –
- Hosting focus groups in locations convenient to constituent groups
- Multiple opportunities for staff to learn about the process and confidentiality, also that the intent was not an assessment of individual performance
- Review team members who were dedicated and enthusiastic about the process
- Child Welfare review team members remained for Probation debrief. This was especially helpful with regards to ICWA services. Cross-training regarding ICWA resources for transitioning youth were identified and connections made.
- Input from review team members and other agency staff on interview tools
- Mock interview sessions to test interview tools with social workers and probation officers
- Staff preparation for interviews
- Decorating interview rooms to make them more welcoming and providing food for staff interviewed
- Use of consultants with experience in the PQCR process

The following measures to improve the process were identified:

- More clearly defined roles of CDSS, Regional Training Academy and county

- Identify review team members and screening process to determine if appropriately matched for focus area and county needs
- Better communication to staff being interviewed regarding the time and other logistics of interview.
- Less redundancy in some interview questions
- Rework or reword and/or better define questions regarding State Technical Assistance

II. Summary of Data

Characteristics of Social Workers and Probation Officers Interviewed

Social Workers

A total of 30 social workers, representing referrals from the six CWS regions, were interviewed as part of the PQCR process. Their characteristics are as follows:

- Average years of Public Child Welfare experience – 7 years and nine months
- Average length of time in Emergency Response – 5 years -

Probation Officers

A total of 7 probation officers were interviewed as part of the PQCR process. Their characteristics are as follows:

- Average years of Probation experience – 5 years
- Average length of time with San Diego County Probation Placement Unit – 3 years

A. SOCIAL WORKER INTERVIEW TREND DATA¹⁰

Documentation

Most social workers discussed the process for receiving and closing referrals and how that process can enhance or challenge practice. Trends in documentation included:

- Workers indicated the use of SDM tools assisted them in documentation and ultimately they felt it helped ensure better assessments of families
- Police Reports come late and are often not attached with the referral
- Inaccurate information can be found on the referral (especially when entered by clerical staff). Insufficient information on referral (this largely depends upon the screener).
- The practice of assigning duplicate referrals, when they could be associated and evaluated out. This would reduce the amount of administrative work for both social workers and supervisors.

¹⁰ For more detailed information see Debrief Matrix in Appendix C

- Limited time to complete necessary documentation, which may lead to scant information.
- There is difficulty in workers ability to easily view other county's referrals in CWS/CMS, although there is a way it's cumbersome and time-consuming.

Strengths and Promising Practices

Clearly defined strengths and promising practices emerged during the interview week. Trends in identification of strengths and promising practices included:

- Specific engagement strategies social workers employed to develop and form relationships with families were consistently noted
- Many workers rely upon the "Buddy System" in the field and informally set visits to include fellow workers and occasionally supervisors
- The majority of the social workers interviewed routinely involved family members in developing the family case plan
- Regardless of the family situation and often when closing a referral, workers gave resource packets to families, which provided a number of varied community organizations they could call for assistance.
- Many social workers were able to clearly articulate methods they utilized to engage families from various cultural backgrounds.

Barriers and Challenges

Many social workers identified the pressures of trying to meet the varied demands of administration and also provide quality social work practice in working with families. Trends in barriers and challenges included:

- Workers identified high caseload size negatively impacts the follow-up and service provision to families and may lead to recurrence if the family is not linked with appropriate services. Workers stated the push to complete the next referral prevents them from focusing too long on one family.
- 30 day time frame to investigate with combined pressure to close the case may also lend to the recurrence of maltreatment. Social workers stated they have very little ability to engage a family, obtain pertinent information, refer the family to appropriate services and then ensure the family receives those services within 30 days. With considerable training on family engagement, it is frustrating to workers not to have the time to fully utilize those skills and see the family return to the CWS because they are not connected with services. The pressure to gather substantive evidence for County Counsel was also listed under this category as potentially adding to the recurrence rate.
- Often times the social worker must close the referral prior to ensuring the family is connected to services, leaving a gap in knowing if the family is receiving the services they need to avoid recurrence of maltreatment.
- Lack of ability to follow up after case is closed
- The PCWTA and CWS offer excellent training; however the workers felt they have no time to attend.

Training Needs

Overall, social workers spoke about the high quality of training offered by both the PCWTA and also CWS. Trends regarding training needs identified by review team members included:

- Investigative Narrative Writing in order to provide a more consistent and thorough documentation of previous history and current family circumstances.
- Difficulty social workers have regarding attending the training due to the lack of available time to attend and the location of the training.
- Social workers are not familiar with Indian Child Welfare Act requirements, which prevented opportunities for families to receive available services in a timely manner.
- There was a lack of general knowledge regarding Tribal resources available for families, which could help prevent recurrence of maltreatment.

Systemic and Policy Changes

Topics in this area largely include the observations from review team members' observations as they interviewed social workers through the week. Trends in systemic and policy changes included:

- 30 day investigation time allotted for social workers to investigate, assess and close referral, limits the ability to work with and provide services to the family.
- Social workers stated that offering more voluntary services to families when they are in crises may help prevent another occurrence of maltreatment and allow for better follow-up to families.
- As cited above, the pressure to close referrals often does not allow social workers to ensure families have engaged in services.
- Reviewers noted low morale among social workers.
- Coordination of services with CalWORKS (Linkages) to maximize opportunities for families.

Resource Issues

This topic area encompasses all of the resources identified to enable social workers to assist families in protecting their children. Trends in Resources included:

- Housing – This was particularly relevant to military families who have been impacted by domestic violence.
- Child care – Social Workers identified that having more resource available to provide families in crisis with child care referrals may reduce further abuse or neglect.
- Lap tops for social workers in the field to maximize their time and enable them to document information in a more timely fashion.
- Transportation resources provided to families continues to be a struggle. Due to size of the county, many families have difficulty traveling to needed services and therefore do not engage.
- Bi-lingual staffs are needed to meet the diverse population needs.

State Technical Assistance

This question in particular, was challenging for many respondents and interviewers to address. In general, there was a lack of understanding regarding what this question was asking. Consideration to rewording or reworking this question should be given. Trends in State Technical Assistance included:

- Assistance in reducing documentation requirements for social workers.
- Will the PQCR review change policy? This is not only for County level, but also social workers would like feedback as to how the PQCR process leads to statewide change.
- Increased payment for foster parents
- Ability to more directly view other county's referrals in CWS/CMS without having the current cumbersome process.

ICWA Findings

Trends regarding serving Native American families included:

- There was a firm acknowledgement of the improvement in communication and placement options for Native Children, however still room to grow. Regions are not consistent in their knowledge and application of ICWA.
- Workers show lack of ICWA knowledge (resources, culture and law) and across regions there are inconsistencies
- Additional training on Tribal resources, law and having the conversation beyond ICWA eligibility.

Other Salient Points

This area includes trends identified that were not directly linked to the focus area but were found important to note. Trends included:

- Develop processes that may improve the early identification process of Native families. E.g. Hotline could ask if for tribal affiliation if they family is identified as Native American. This may initiate culturally appropriate intervention and support services earlier in CWS involvement.
- The relationship between County Counsel and CWS was tense and social workers often felt as though attorney's would interfere with their assessment of family functioning and refuse court intervention – social

workers would like to see more communication and a better relationship. Social workers and supervisors alike stated that often with considerable evidence and concern their requests for court intervention are often denied due to technical issues. This difficulty in approaching County Counsel has even led some to hesitate bringing forth potential petitions, as it requires a fair amount of time and due diligence to present a case to County Counsel, often taking away from time which could be spent working with a family. This especially pertains to referrals/cases where there are not exigent circumstances to remove children.

- Overall feedback indicated the PQCR process was enjoyable and it was nice for peer reviewers to see the enthusiasm of workers participating.

B. PROBATION OFFICER INTERVIEW TREND DATA¹¹

Documentation

Most Probation Officers discussed the process for receiving and transferring cases and the difficulty of having little information regarding a youth's background. Trends in documentation included:

- Probation Officers identified there is not enough information on cases transferred from 300(Child Welfare) to 602 (Probation). It would be helpful to have the full family social history and help understand where the youth is coming from.
- The same was acknowledged for the WIC 750 transfer process. There is not enough information provided to gain full understanding of the youth's background and family social history.
- The initial Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) is not completed by the placement Probation Officers and therefore is often not relevant to the youth's current circumstance or known by the probation officer. The TILP is seen as the primary document which helps to focus the efforts made by the Department in preparing youth for transition, much like a case plan it identifies services and documents responsibility. The TILP is, as one review team member put it, a "living document" which should change as the youth changes and matures. Each placement probation officer may find value in completing the document, as it may assist in assessing the youth's readiness and help to target services toward specific needs.

Strengths and Promising Practices

Clearly defined strengths and promising practices emerged during the interview week. Trends in identification of strengths and promising practices included:

- Good engagement skills with youth (rapport building, honesty around current circumstance and choices, candid, empowering youth)
- Manageable caseloads in placement unit enable probation officers to spend more time with the youth and to really engage them.

¹¹ For more detailed information see Debrief Matrix in Appendix D

- All probation officers were consistently positive about their job and the youth they serve.

Barriers and Challenges

Many probation officers identified the challenges of trying to meet the needs of youth with limited knowledge of the youth's background and family and available resources. Trends in barriers and challenges included:

- Resources for services for youth, as there are often long waiting lists for transitional services and the in the intervening time youth often re-offend.
- Another challenge identified indicates that once a youth re-offends and is put in Juvenile Hall; all transitional services to that youth are suspended.
- The lack of parent engagement and participation makes it difficult to plan for successful transition, especially when it is known the youth will return to the family upon discharge.
- Many Probation youth not eligible for transitional housing programs due to their offense, this limits their options for transitional planning and preparation.

Training Needs

Trends regarding training needs identified included:

- Cross training with Child Welfare to increase the level of knowledge regarding roles and responsibilities of Child Welfare in serving youth in transition.
- Probation officers had little general knowledge of ILP/Transitional resources beyond the referral process. The same was said for ILP contractors. Cross-training would help improve communication. Many of the probation officers were not able to identify the different resources available to aide youth in their transition. While transitional housing was often cited, probation officers were not able to articulate what services beyond housing youth could engage in and how the probation officer could be a support to youth seeking those services. Review team members noted that more communication between the disciplines would help to streamline the process for youth, prevent any duplication of efforts and help everyone working with the youth in the same manner.
- Training on diagnosis and general mental health needs of Probation youth. This training would provide probation officers knowledge on how and when to make appropriate referrals and assist them with placement decisions and options that best meet the needs of the youth.

Systemic and Policy Changes

Trends in systemic and policy changes included:

- Transfer of cases and improving the documentation provided during the transfer process. Probation officers identified that a lack of information regarding a youth who has a full family history in the Child Welfare system, can be frustrating and it makes it difficult when assessing the

youth for appropriate services. ILS contractors identified the same difficulty when receiving referrals for Probation youth. When scant information is provided the ILS workers often rely on the youth to fill in the gaps to the best of their ability.

- Trouble with maintaining Medi-Cal insurance when youth have been moved from placement to placement.
- Out of county ILP services are inconsistent. When youth are placed out of county there is no way to ensure they are properly being prepared for transitioning to adulthood.

Resource Issues

The resource issues identified for Probation focused around the limited ability to provide much needed services to youth, especially to those who have committed sexual or violent offenses. Trends in Resource issues included:

- Need more available Foster Family Agency (FFA) homes for Probation
- Transitional housing beds dedicated for Probation, especially sex offenders
- Limited eligibility and availability for youth who have committed violent offenses.

State Technical Assistance

This area in particular, was challenging for many respondents and interviewers to address. In general, there was a lack of understanding regarding what this question was asking. Consideration to rewording or reworking this question should be given. Trends in State Technical Assistance included:

- When youth are placed from county to county there is trouble maintaining medical insurance (Medi-Cal). This disruption can delay necessary medical/mental health services critical to the youth's functioning.
- The Division 31 regulations are inconsistent regarding TILP timeframes and this is confusing for County's to interpret.

Other Salient Points

This area includes points identified that were not directly linked to the focus area but were found important to note. :

- Independent living services for youth out of county are inconsistent and many youth do not receive adequate preparation.
- The TILP was seen more as a formality for probation officers, as opposed to a resource document that should be used to assess youth and be an aide in preparing youth for exiting the system.

C. FOCUS GROUPS TREND DATA

Ten focus groups were held during the week of April 7-11, 2008. The focus group varied in size, with the smallest including four people and the largest including eleven. The information below is some of the focus groups trends

reported. Focus Group Debrief tools are attached to PQCR Reports as attachments.

Child Welfare Focus Groups Trends

Documentation

- Inaccurate/Incomplete referrals
- Multiple referrals on the same incident with slightly different allegations are investigated separately and not being associated which increases the perception of recurrence of maltreatment after the two referrals are substantiated.

Strengths and Promising Practices

- Throughout all of the focus groups a consistent display of cultural considerations by social workers was demonstrated.
- Team Decision Making Meetings are helpful when collaborating with service providers and the local community.
- Program providing parent advocacy which provides parent support was seen positively by parents.

Barriers and Challenges

- The waitlist for services impacted the workers lack of ability to ensure a family was engaged in services prior to closing the referral.
- Transportation was an issue underscored in all groups, particularly the groups with parents. Many parents stated they have difficulty participating in services due to transportation and appreciate when they are able to attend services that don't require extensive travel time or resources.
- Many workers and supervisors felt that even in high risk situations the attorneys do not assist in having the family presented before the judge.
- Language barriers are present even when using interpreters due to interpreter lack of knowledge of CWS.
- Caseload size in the front end and limited time to work with a family restricts social workers ability to follow-up with a family.
- There is a disconnect between military services and CWS.

Training Needs

- Offer training at regional locations and in shorter increments that would facilitate social workers attendance.
- Additional training to assist social workers understand military issues, especially those around deployment and domestic violence.

Systemic and Policy Changes

- Trepidation to not file on an "Emotional Abuse" petitions if the parent is unwilling to cooperate or accept services.
- Many of the groups spoke of "Betty Crocker" cookbook or cookie cutter approach to case plans for families that can lead to duplication of services or families receiving service they don't really need.

Resource Issues

- Waitlists for services, including Community Services for Families (CSF).
- Having more social workers would enable staff to do "social work" and engage a family and ensure the services being recommended meet the needs of the family.
- Parents expressed a wonderful idea of providing a "Paperwork Clinic", where parents can go to receive help to understand and complete paperwork.

State Technical Assistance

- SDM-specifically around the use of SDM in Court as assistance to "legitimize" the assessment process for the Department.

Other Salient Points

- Families felt that it would be helpful, upon initial contact to have some information about the process and the next steps.
- While there were no consistent comments regarding County Counsel and the Court, the general position of social workers, supervisors and service providers was that these entities prevent social workers from doing social work.

Tribal Child Welfare Focus Group

Documentation

- There is an inconsistency in providing court documents to parents and ICWA providers (reports, case plan, minute orders, etc.)

Strengths and Promising Practices

- Vertical case management in the Indian Specialty Unit is strength and works best with the Indian community.
- Increase in relative/NREFM placement in the tribal community.
- Notable change in the relationship between the county social worker and the ICWA social workers. It was felt that training around ICWA has been helpful to improve this relationship.
- ICWA workers do not end services following CWS referral closing, the workers continue to provide services and support the family.
- Team Decision Meetings, are helpful when collaborating with service providers and the local community. Consensus was that they would like to have more held on the reservation because there is limited or no public transportation to the meeting location.

Barriers and Challenges

- Transportation-the size of the County makes it difficult for families to get where they need to go to complete the necessary services. Heavy reliance and or expectation on ICWA workers to provide transportation.

- Across groups it was felt that the services provided by CWS were dependent upon the relationship the service provider had with the social worker. In regards to ICWA, "Services should not be contingent upon relationship, it's the law".
- Adoptions units lagging behind when it comes down to ICWA compliance.
- While there was acknowledgment that ICWA compliance has improved, there remains a difference in the way many social workers are interpreting ICWA regulations. This is most apparent in the home approval process for emergency placement.

Training Needs

- Additional training on Native Culture, and ICWA related issues.

Systemic Policy Changes

- Cookie cutter approach to case planning for families can lead to a duplication of services or families receiving services they do not actually need.

Resource Issues

- Across the board, focus group participants spoke of the long wait list for services and how during a crisis a family is open to services, but once the crisis is over they are not as motivated to seek or engage in services and prevents families from being linked to services before a referral closes.
- Need for follow-up or aftercare services may be helpful. Traditionally once someone works with a native family you are connected for life, ending abruptly seems unnatural. Many times this becomes the most vulnerable time.
- When the group was told that the Native Families had one of the lowest recurrence rates in the County, this was given as a reason- "We don't close our cases so quickly, we remain with the family and continue the relationship."

State Technical Assistance

No technical assistance mentioned.

Other Salient Points

- It is important to keep tribal youth sense of identity by keeping them connected to their tribal community when they are placed off of the reservation and in a city.
- ICWA workers are open to ride-along with social workers especially when developing and reviewing the case plans with the family; exception is at removals since this may cause a barrier between them and the family.

Probation Focus Groups

Documentation

- Referral process to service providers is difficult and limited on information about the youth.
- Providers and caregivers frequently do not receive court orders or service plans to know the services and needs of the youth.
- Outdated list of resources for youth, and community services list.
- Arrest records of youth are not being expunged.

Promising Practices and Strengths

- Excellent relationship between Probation Officers and youth
- Service Providers and Probation Officers eager to resolve problems to better serve youth
- Lack of information provided with referrals to ILP and transfers from CWS.
- Cross training between ILP contractors, CWS, Probation need to discuss roles, resources and how to best meet the needs of the youth.
- Transitional Housing and resources for youth, especially those who have committed violent offenses.

Barriers and Challenges

- Inability of youth in getting connected to services.
- Lack of communication with PO and parents/caregivers and in some instances youth
- Independent Readiness Conferences only done with foster youth—need to expand to Probation wards.
- Care providers many times are not provided any information about the youth's background or the requirements of Probation.

Training Needs

- Cross training on what the role of service provider (ILP) is and what is Probation's staff role.
- Financial literacy training for youth exiting the system.

System and Policy Changes

- Referral system for ILS services that will improve transfer and transitional needs of youth.
- Review policy and procedures about what to do when a youth expresses they feel unsafe.

Resource Issues

- Transitional housing for Probation Youth
- Aftercare services/wraparound
- Provide prevention services for younger offenders.

State Technical Assistance

- Fiscal component- to handle billing from other Counties.
- Standardize all ILS services regardless of contract agency.

Other Salient Points

- Look at all options for youth including field trips to vocational schools.
- Improve mental health services for youth.

III. FINAL OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although both Probation and CWS showed a great deal of strength, both in staff and agency practices, there were areas identified by the interview teams and focus groups that could make improvements with respect to the focus areas selected. Recommendations are categorized according to the debrief tool in the following areas:

- Documentation
- Barriers and Challenges
- Training
- Systemic and Policy
- Resource Issues
- State Technical Assistance

Peer Recommendations for Documentation

Child Welfare

- Develop expedited process to receive police reports
- Conduct assessment to determine training needs for processing ER referrals

Probation

- WIC 750 Inter-County transfers – all available police, school, mental health, CWS and Probation information should be in transfer packet.
- WIC 300 to 602 – more case coordination with CWS staff. Quarterly meetings.
- Regardless of the status of youth, if both agencies are involved both can do joint family visits. Meet and confer process is great, if done correctly.
- TILP should be a living document, utilized by all probation officers in assessment.

Peer Recommendations for Barriers and Challenges

Child Welfare

- Clarify with CDSS 30 day timeframe dates
- Pros vs. Cons of 30-60 day timeframe for referrals
- Utilization of Social Worker I and support staff
- Regionalized Training
- Examine County Counsel practice
-

Probation

- Expand current transitional services to reduce waitlists
- Expand bed capacity for Probation youth
- Educate placement resource providers to reduce fear and dispel stereotypes

Peer Recommendations for Training

Child Welfare

- Continue Excellent Training!
- Review current ICWA regulations training
- Develop social worker training about available Tribal resources
- Provide regular training on new template for standardized investigative narratives

Probation

- Cross Training with child welfare re: effects of multiple placements
- Training on diagnosis and general mental health issues present in the youth Probation serves. This training would also help to provide probation officers with when to make appropriate referrals and what placement option best meets the needs of the youth.
- TILP and ILP services, to both familiarize probation officers with available resources and to help them to better assess the youth they are serving and by doing so, coordinate more individualized transitional services.
- Life Skills Assessment training would provide concrete tool guidance for probation officer to utilize in assessing youth for their upcoming transition. One suggestion was the Ansell Casey Life Skills assessment.

Peer Recommendations for Systemic and Policy Changes

Child Welfare

- Review of Policy to close referrals within 30 days.
- Document that the social worker has considered and offered voluntary services in the investigative narrative.
- Linkages plan with CalWORKS

Probation

- WIC 750 inter-county transfer process policy improvement
- Continuing Medi-Cal insurance coverage when a youth is transitioning from one placement to the next or to streamline the process so the youth does not lose any valuable benefits (Rx, medical/mental health services).
- WIC 241.1 reports, lead agency is defined. One joint recommendation is made.

Peer Recommendation regarding Resource Issues

Child Welfare

- Technical Resources for field work including lap tops
- Establish task force to identify ways to increase resources for low-income families
- Recruitment & retention of Bi-lingual staff

Probation

- Implementing Family Finding process
- Implement a system for Independent Readiness Conferences (IRC), to mirror the current IRC process which Child Welfare has instituted and works well
- .Increase transitional housing beds

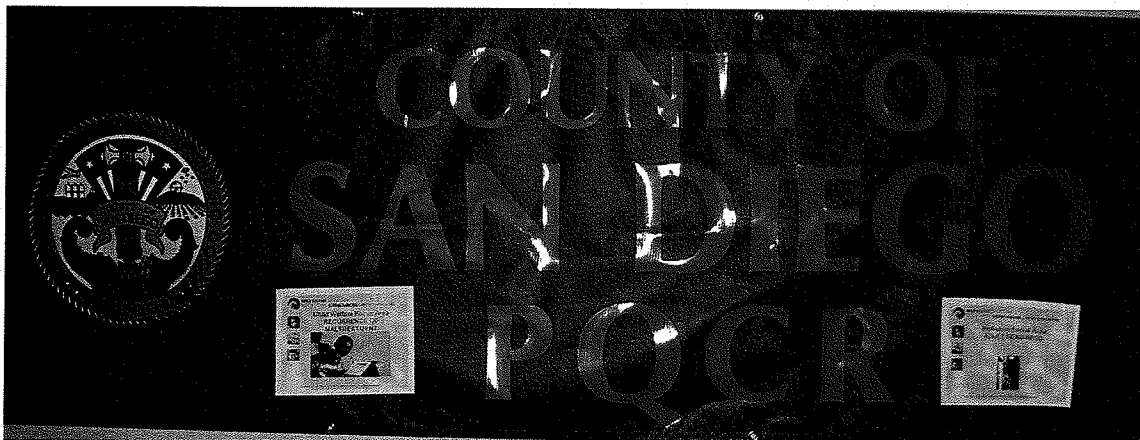
Peer Recommendations involving State Technical Assistance

Child Welfare

- Allow for County's to have read-only status for open referrals

Probation

- TILP should be a living document
- Ensure Medi-Cal process become more seamless between placement transitions, especially between counties
- ILS programs vary from county to county and should be more consistent
- Clarify Div 31 regulation timeline for submitting TILP updates



CITATIONS

Kohl, P. L., and Barth, R. P. 2007. Child Maltreatment Recurrence among Children Remaining In-Home: Predictors of Re-Reports. Pages 207-225 in R. Haskins, F. Wulczyn, and M.B. Webb, eds. Child Protection: Using Research to Improve Policy and Practice. Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC